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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA: FORMER GENERAL TROUBLED BY THE STATE
OF THE SANDF

REF: PRETORIA 1825

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Brigadier General (Ret) George Kruys, now a lecturer at University of Pretoria, shared with Poloffs his perspective on the current state of the South African National Defense Force (SANDF). Kruys discussed lack of discipline as a function of pressure on the institution from extended deployments, poor training, and high HIV and AIDS rates. Kruys, who played a pivotal role in South Africa's military transformation, expressed concern that, despite promising new recruits, the SANDF might not be able to withstand the tremendous pressure it is facing from a variety of internal and external sources. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) General Kruys met recently with Poloffs to discuss his work in compiling a report entitled "South African Army Priorities and Roles in the Early 21st Century" for the Institute for Strategic Studies. The report made local headlines with the revelation that the SANDF had recorded 2,159 cases of disciplinary misdemeanors and military trials involving South African Africa troops deployed in peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan over the past six years. The news of the number of discipline cases involving SANDF peacekeepers came as a shock to South African readers accustomed to praise for South Africa's role in peacekeeping on the continent. The report and the subsequent admission by Army Lieutenant-General Solly Shoke that ill discipline is a serious problem within the SANDF foreshadowed recent violent protests by soldiers (see Reftel).

¶3. (SBU) The problem of ill-discipline in the SANDF is particularly troubling for Kruys, who was one of the early architects of the transformation of the apartheid-era South African Defense Force (SADF) into the SANDF. Kruys briefly discussed his role in the early 1990's in commanding military forces sent to establish peace between African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) irregulars. He also spoke of his work in integrating the ANC's military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) paramilitary forces and allied paramilitary groups into the new South African military, the SANDF. Kruys credited a 1993 month-long U.S. sponsored leadership course with playing a critical role in knitting together apartheid-era forces and newly integrated paramilitary into a single military command structure. Kruys commented that one of the most difficult problems facing today's SANDF, resolving the status of, and assigning benefits to, Umkhonto we Sizwe veterans, is complicated by the lack of accurate personnel records on former ANC military operatives. Encouraging the retirement of unskilled MK veterans from the SANDF is one of the biggest challenges the military faces in Kruys' view.

14. (SBU) Kruys expressed a degree of optimism regarding the quality of the SANDF's new recruits, but he expressed concern that training practices in place, such as pass-one, pass-all, will prevent the military from utilizing fully the new talent it attracts. Kruys would also like to see more joint operations to encourage the services to work together and learn from one another. He expressed optimism that new initiatives are under way to address skills shortages in the military but was worried that the new programs would not reach large numbers of officers fast enough to counteract growing problems.

15. (SBU) The problem of lack of discipline in the military took center stage on August 26 when a demonstration in Pretoria of soldiers demanding wage increases turned violent. This problem was underscored when Defense Minister Liidiwe's Sisulu defended her decision to fire the striking soldiers. For General Kruys, discipline is lax in the SANDF because punishment is not implemented effectively and decisively. He told POLOFFS that large numbers of SANDF soldiers are suspended without pay as their cases take up to two years to be reviewed. Kruys commented that the SANDF's long deployments for peacekeeping operations are detrimental to strong discipline. The retired general believes the South African military is over-stretched by overly long-duration deployments during which soldiers receive no training and are often bored. Kruys believes that battalion-sized peacekeeping deployments are too large for the SANDF, and he added that deployment rotation schedules need to be addressed. He said that expecting soldiers to be deployed for six out of every eighteen months is taxing on the personal lives of soldiers and leads to psychological problems.

16. (SBU) Kruys noted that added to the SANDF's many other problems, an HIV rate that could be anywhere from 20 to 40 percent is an enormous burden on the nascent institution. For Kruys, the hope for the SANDF lies in the future, which means that attention must be given to HIV testing for new recruits, to intensifying initial and in-service training, to planning for joint operations that will build rather than deplete skills. Finally, General Kruys would like South Africa's political leaders consider to factor in the welfare and development of the SANDF when they consider peacekeeping commitments.

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